Minutes approved 7/16/19

Present: Chair Mike Zeldin and Members Mike Fontanella, Jonathan Liebowitz, Lyle Webster, Anna Hueston, Chase Gerbig
Also present: Maren Toohill, Nina Nazarian

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and Chair Mike Zeldin welcomed all present.
The meeting was called to order at 7:00.

Zeldin announced Hueston will be leaving the board after today’s meeting. She will, however, continue as a member of the Planning Board, and will continue providing support as needed. Thanked Hueston for the services provided as a valued member of the board.

1. Preparation and Drafting of Update on progress implementing the Master Plan:

Zeldin stated there is ongoing communication to the town about progress being made on the various programs and aims contained in the master plan. Asked for Gerbig’s opinion on the value of this committee drafting the materials and undertaking the task of promoting and reporting on the master plan, frequency and message content.

Gerbig indicated the boards need to analyze current communications, on ongoing projects, and analyze where it has gone well, where it could be improved, where it has been poorly received. Stated that part of that is the lack of harmonized message between the boards (using the sewer system project as an example) regarding revitalizing the economic interests, the sewer aspects, and the environmental components. The goal as a committee is to address those components holistically, and although the board has helped, compartmentalization is still impacting projects, not just the sewer. Feels the boards are not ready to report on a regular basis. Regarding frequency, the public response to Board of Selectmen outreach thus far has been that the boards are too early or too late.

Zeldin indicated that part of the problem could be the public doesn’t see any physical evidence of change. Liebowitz commented that it takes many years from when the new zoning is adopted, for any visible work to appear. Proposed that some of the actions envisioned for the common can be done right away, to give people a sense that something is actually happening, such as streetscapes.

Fontanella stated that some of the actions the master plan is suggesting would be good for the town are difficult, complex, and have long durations. The process has an “ebb and flow”, and the board needs to avoid making hasty decisions when caught on the web. The boards were supported by professional staff, and will be able to get to a vote on the various issues. Whether or not the town supports the presented vision is to be determined. The boards need to keep working the process. Expressed the opinion that the MPIC board needs to check with the other boards, regarding following the process, providing updates. Update the master plan as needed based on input, as an iterative process. Important; follow the process, stay consistent on the message and deliverables, especially on a long term project such as this.

Webster noted that public tolerance for unfinished business depends on the vision of the end result, and understanding of the path to reach it. The board’s task is to keep the project moving forward.

Hueston stated it is the responsibility of MPIC to report, since this group is the one with purview of the entire project, and as such, should be able to look at all recommendations, identify the town’s focus,
and where it stands on the recommendations. If there is nothing documented to show what we’ve done and reported, it would cause problems. It’s in our best interest to report. It’s important that we, including the town, celebrate the accomplishments to date, and identify what is left to do.

Zeldin specified that the report should focus on the 7 items MPIC identified as top priority, as they are the longer lead time items. Report should be done in increments of several months, not necessarily immediately on all 7. Should include current status, reason for the status and its significance and context. Used housing as an example of an item that can be reported on, as significant work has already been done.

Gerbig opined that rather than reporting on the 7 biggest priorities, the report follows the master plan structure of land use, transportation, and economic development to the extent of how one the higher priorities fits within the plan. Zeldin agreed. Toohill agreed that the town would find such a report useful, and that it should celebrate the accomplishments. Webster and Zeldin decided that a venue would be town meetings, as well as the newspaper, online and any available media.

It was decided that it would be addressed one item at a time. The board will decide on a best strategy, who will do the work of presenting the information. For the moment, the goal is to establish that the board is in agreement and supports the notion of doing this work.

Liebowitz asked if MPIC is supposed to be providing updates to the PB and board of selectmen, on what has been accomplished. Zeldin stated MPICs focus should be providing updates to the town, since the PB and selectmen routinely get updates.

Hueston reiterated that there should be a periodic, formal report to the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen, in addition to other types of reporting via general media, including a briefing and reasons to celebrate.

Fontanella summarized that the intent of the report is to raise awareness in community input, show there are multiple projects being worked on, and that the town is moving forward. Proposed a procedure for doing it; select a project and a couple of persons to put together a template effort. The board should then revise it until it meets the needs. Once there is an established, standardized template, which will include consistent task assignments, it can then be used for other projects on the master plan.

After further discussion, the board decided to group the reports by the master plan’s strategies and themes, in summary format. Fontanella and Gerbig will cooperate in preparing a template, timeline to be determined. Zeldin proposed having the first report draft, 2 strategies, at the September MPIC meeting.

Zeldin introduced Nina Nazarian, the new town administrator.

2. Assessment of Programs/Tasks by Relevant Committees:
Zeldin Discussed task responsibility and costs. Posed the following questions:
- What is Littleton’s capacity for growth, and how can we improve it to achieve the various goals of the master plan?
- How well are we doing with the major strategic areas, resource allocation and coordination?
Expressed concern about “real cost centers and investments by the town” being treated as one and the same. Gerbig indicated there is very little flexibility in the majority of the budget, and there is a very small pool of funds to be allocated to the needs/wants category. Gerbig indicated that where we can provide value to the community is by harnessing the message of multiple groups and organizations within town, where there are overlapping priorities.

One of the ways we can solve some of those budgetary limitations, is to bring to bear multiple committees who have a common interest with one master plan objective, in particular where there is a funding source other than the town funding source, so that state reps, administration, regional planning organizations, for example, are aware of moving forward on those.

Communications between the boards and committees that we are impaneled to support could be significantly improved, and really hit the bottom line in a budgetary sense. We are not going to substantively change the amount of cash available in the budget to pursue lesser priorities.
Hueston discussed the meaning of #59, one of the top 7; “establish mechanisms and policies that link the implementation of the master plan to annual work plans, budgets and capital projects”. Some of what the town wants to accomplish fall within a want or a need. Asked how does town plan and budget for those things. Can we set up milestones so we can implement a budget to meet the town’s needs? Fontanella stated we are doing that.

Gerbig stated that the importance of the MPIC, and the value it can have to the community is keeping the momentum on those very important but lower profile type of items, such as a policy on affordable housing improvement. Fontanella cautioned that MPIC shouldn’t overstep its charter to the point where it tells the board of selectmen how to better govern the town. MPIC should present its ideas only as related to the master plan.

Zeldin stated that often the net financial gain of implementing an improvement to the town is minimized by the cost of sourcing and sustaining the improvement.

Gerbig stated that one of the issues not addressed well is the incremental cost on staff time. As the implementation committee push these things forward, it needs to be aware of the burden that it will put on the staff, and ask whether it is going to be worth it to the community. What is the opportunity cost?

Hueston indicated the report template should provide a status update on the various strategies, and identify financial resources and trade-offs that had to be made as potential causes of delay.

Fontanella agreed. Reiterated the need to document issues, and identify why at times the choice is made to not do something.

Zeldin stated the action the board could take on this issue is to provide very clear input and guidance to certain committees. Asked how do to improve that area. For example, is it beneficial to enlist the economic development committee, and give them specific ways to think about their role actively / passively?

Fontanella replied: it’s reasonable to meet with them, and explain what needs to be discussed. Ask for updates on items assigned to them. The feedback may indicate they have made progress on some, may not have discussed others yet, or that they have decided others will not happen, and why. That documented information will provide valuable input for future board members, and guide future decisions.

Hueston indicated the economic development board (EDC) takes direction from the Board of Selectmen. Zeldin followed that MPIC gives guidance to the EDC, but the Board of Selectmen should be telling them what to do. Gerbig concurred and proposed the following: get the committees and commissions together and show them what we said we would accomplish collectively as a town. Ask that at their next meeting they schedule 20 minutes to discuss what they have done with respect to the master plan, what they expect to do, where it fits in their plan, and send us a summarized update report.

Zeldin indicated those were the instructions to all committees and commissions. The PB does it routinely. Hueston suggested an alternate approach: Get individuals together for an informal update. Fontanella stated the need to identify what to do with the information once acquired. Needs to be documented for future reference. Zeldin asked: can the board of selectmen communicate with the boards and ask them to look at the master plan, and formulate an action plan that fits their role? Gerbig responded an action plan would be too much right now. The most effective piece right now would be to simply remind them that the master plan exists and ask them to go through the exercise of reviewing the 67 goals, as just reviewing them will be productive.

Followed up with Hueston’s suggestion of an informal meeting over coffee to document updates. If no progress on the goals, ask what resources they need to accomplish the 2 top priority goals. Indicated the committees and commissions need to be informed that the data they provide will be aggregated and shared with the community. Zeldin indicated that he would get started on that, and asked Webster to work with him on it.

3. **Goal Setting** – Zeldin indicated the MPIC has identified and set goals. See above.
4. **Organization** – Zeldin asked the board if they wanted to change how it is organized. Fontanella indicated there are possibly 2 new members joining. Wait until it is settled and revisit.

5. **Public Input**
   Town Administrator Nina Nazarian indicated she has been a part of master plan execution, but not familiar with a master plan implementation committee. In the past, has not been a part of drafting master plans, as normally they have already been in place and progressing.
   Zeldin indicated he is looking for lessons learned from her experience in other communities. Nazarian expressed her opinion that prioritizing tasks and focusing on them rather than spreading resources too thin, is important.

**Minutes:** Fontanella moved to approve October 23d, 2018 minutes, Webster seconded. Approved 5:0, Fontanella abstained. Fontanella moved to approve the minutes of December 11th, 2018, Gerbig seconded. Approved 6:0. Fontanella made a motion to approve the minutes from January 15th, 2019, Liebowitz seconded. Approved 6:0. Fontanella motioned to approve the minutes from April 9th, 2019, Gerbig seconded. Approved 5:0, Hueston abstained.

**Next meeting:** The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 16th, 2019. Zeldin indicated that Nick Lawler, manager of the Littleton water department, has been invited to be present at that meeting, for a discussion on natural resources, and the future water quality / quantity for the town.

**Member Input:**
   Gerbig provided the following announcements: An applicant for a recreation marijuana license has come before the board of selectmen with an application to open an establishment in the common. Recommended MPIC review it, as it pertains to the common. There are 4 other applicants for licenses. The town can grant 2, therefore it will become a selection process.
   At the last board of selectmen meeting, the board was approached by a representative for the owner of 19 Tahattawan, a 25 acre parcel, interested in negotiating with the town to acquire that property. Not in formal proceedings yet.
   Fontanella stated it is a potential change to the town’s bylaws, regarding how the town allocates field and building use to interested groups, for educational and community recreation purposes.
   Gerbig indicated the board of selectmen voted unanimously not to support it.
   Hueston announce the next information meeting of the Form Based Code will be held on July 25th 2019. Indicated it would be beneficial to have architects and engineers who could help attend this meeting, learn more about the proposal for the zoning and the common, and provide feedback to the committee.
   Toohill announced survey #3 for the Littleton Station Area Study is up, link to the town web site and the planning page. Deadline for the survey is June 28th.
   Hueston indicated that Toohill has submitted another grant to the EEA for work related to the open space and how we can take a look at TDR (Transfer of Development Rights) Expect a reply in 6 weeks.

**Adjourn:** Gerbig motioned to adjourn, Fontanella seconded. All in favor, 6:0.

**DOCUMENTS**

**Agenda**